



BHAGVĀN DĀS HENDĪ

BHAGVĀN DĀS HENDĪ, son of Dalpat Dās, grandson of Harbans Rāy, Indian poet and author writing in Persian. He belonged to the Hindu Srīvāstava Kāyastha community, which is known for its deep interest in Persian. According to Bhagvān Dās (*Safīna*, p. 241), his ancestors, originally from Kālpī in Uttar Pradesh, lived at Sōndā (pp. 87, 241). Bhagvān Dās was born in 1164/1750-51 at Ṣaydpūr (or Ṣadrpūr; Raḥmān, p. III) at the home of his maternal grandfather Lālā Rām Ġolām, a *qānūngū* or revenue officer. Barely two years old he was taken to Lucknow to his father, Dalpat Dās, who had a civil job during Borhān-al-Molk's (d. 1152/1739-40) governorship of Avadh (from 1134/1721-22; *Safīna*, p. 34). There he received his education, first from his family tutor Ḥaqqdād Khan (*Safīna*, p. 87) and later from Mawlawī Sayyed Yūsuf of Sahāranpūr, who taught him Arabic, Persian, and other traditional subjects. He then devoted himself to the study of history and biographies, as well as the *dīvāns* of Persian poets such as 'Abd-al-Qāder Bīdel (d. 1133/1720; *Safīna*, p. 29) and Ḥazīn Lāhījī (d. 1193/1779; *Safīna*, p. 52). Bhagvān Dās seems to have inherited the poetic faculty from his father, who composed poetry in Braj, a dialect of Hindi. His teacher in the art of poetry was Mīrzā Fāḡer Makīn (d. 1221/1806-07), who had migrated to Lucknow in 1173/1759-60. He wrote first under the pen name Besmel but later on changed it to Hendī.

Like his father, Bhagvān Dās entered the royal service, first as the *mīr-e baḥr* (master of the waterways) of Allahabad, at the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna (Jumna) rivers, under Nawab Moḡtār-al-Dawla Bahādor. Later on he became the *dīvān* of Rajah Nedhī Singh Bahādor, where he enjoyed a high



position and claims to have recruited five hundred horsemen. After the death of the rajah, Bhagvān Dās served various nobles at the court of Āṣaf-al-Dawla. During this period he seems to have traveled to Benares, Patna, and Calcutta (*Safīna*, p. 86). The date of his death is unknown.

Bhagvan composed three *matnawīs*: *Selselat al-maḥabbat*, modeled on *Selselat al-dahab* of Jāmī; *Maḥzar al-anwār*, on Neẓamī's *Maḥzan al-asrār*; and *Mehr-e Žiā*, in the meter of *Yūsof o Zolaykā* of Jāmī. He compiled two *dīvāns* of *ġazals*, *qaṣīdas*, *tarjībānds*, etc. (*Šawqīya* and *Dawqīya*). Of his poetry only 172 lines, added to the autobiographical note in his *Safīna-ye Hendī*, are extant. In prose Bhagvān Dās wrote a biography of the Prophet Moḥammad (*Sawāneḥ al-nobowwa*) and two *taḍkeras* of Persian poets; one of the *taḍkeras*, the comparatively voluminous *Ḥadīqa-ye Hendī* (comp. 1200/1785-86), containing the biographies of the Persian poets who were born in India or lived there, from the earliest times up to 1200/1785-86 appears to be lost; the other, *Safīna-ye Hendī* (completed 1219/1804-05), contains the biographies of 335 Persian poets of India (arranged alphabetically and including Hendī himself) from the accession of Moḥammad Shah (r. 1131-61/1718-48) in 1131/1718-19 to 1219/1804-05. (A note referring to 9 Jomādā I, 1220/1805 on p. 81 thus seems to be a later addition.) Bhagvān Dās has included in this *taḍkera* notices of about seventy Iranian poets who had migrated from Iran to India during this time. Besides, a number of other Iranian poets are mentioned whose ancestors had migrated to India a generation or two earlier. Many of these Iranian poets migrated to India after the conquest of Isfahan by the Afghans in 1135/1722 and from Delhi to Lucknow after Nāder Shah conquered Delhi and ordered a massacre in 1151/1739. Seven of Bhagvān's own students in poetry are mentioned in the *Safīna* (pp. 22, 74, 88, 96, 115, 196, 212).

Bhagvān Dās, a man always ready to help the needy poets who came to him for assistance (pp. 103, 124, 193, 237), personally knew many of the poets mentioned in *Safīna*, and his accounts of them can be assumed to be authentic and reliable.



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(N. H. Ansari)